

墨宝非宝 作品

神之左手

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God's Left Hand - Volume 00

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Chapter 1

God's Left Hand - Prelude: Chapter 1

The taxi stopping in front of the resort, Ai Qing (艾情) saw a large banner with the words “WCG Asian Tournament Contestants Village” on it. She secretly let out a sigh of relief and casually pulled up her hair. She got out of the taxi, taking her the luggage from the taxi driver, and walked into the village.

There were many restaurants and shops along the road.

But it was already past midnight, except for the 24-hour supermarket and the bright McDonald's sign, there were no restaurants open at this time. She stood at the crossroad, hesitating for 3 seconds, and decided to look for her team first.

This time there were 11 players from China. They all came as a group, but she was the only one who had come late.

When she walked into the lobby of the resort, there were only two receptionists chatting with each other. They were talking about the WCG Asian Tournament and were full of amazement. Basically, they just couldn't understand how anyone could become a professional at playing video games and that there are even Asian Tournaments and World Competitions!

Ai Qing took out her passport and briefly explained, “I'm looking for the

Chinese team; and my room key, please.”

The receptionist took the passport and looked at it. After pulling out some data, she quickly made a phone call.

Ai Qing took over the phone. On the other end there was a big boy bashfully asking who it was in English. She laughed. “Slide (滑梯, Hua Ti), no need to speak English now. It’s me.”^[1]

“Good grief! Say it in the first place!” Slide said happily. “You’re 4 or 5 hours late. We’re about to call it a day.”

“You’re night owls, can’t be sleeping this early.” Ai Qing held the phone between her chin and neck, taking the paperwork handed over by the front desk and signed her name smoothly.

“Which cabin are you guys in?”

“We are at the westmost side of the resort, 3B. Room 207, at the end of the second floor.”

She acknowledged it and hung up the phone. Suddenly the receptionist, smiling, put a lei over Ai Qing’s neck.^[2] “Welcome to the Singapore’s WCG Asian Tournament Contestants Village!”

Ai Qing just so happened to be wearing a beach styled long skirt. With the lei hanging from her neck, she transformed into a welcoming hostess..... She was quite uncomfortable for a while. Finally, following the direction Slide gave her, she slowly walked along the white stone path on the beach towards the westernmost side.

All the buildings in the resort were wooden structures, sitting on the beach on top of dark colored wood stilts. Each cabin was not far apart from each other.

It took her almost 20 minutes in the darkness to find the right place. She knocked on the door.

There was no answer.

It was 207, she made sure.

She knocked on the door again. As she was just about to call out to Slide, the door

opened from inside. A boy, with right hand on the door frame, appeared in front of her.

It's Dt.

Three months ago, Dt was the most valuable player on the DotA championship team, at the Chinese Regional of the WCG Asian Tournament.

There were 9 teams competing at the final round. Her team was eliminated by his. She shook his hand after that game and regretfully gave him her blessings. "Don't disgrace the Chinese in Singapore."

She actually lost to a fifteen years old boy!

.....

Alright, with those solemn words, she thought she had taken a perfect bow. She never would have thought that the first night in Singapore she would run into him.

He must have been just stepping out of the shower, wet hair fell down his face with blurry eyes. With the dim yellowish lights on the hallway, she could see water dripping from his face. When she recalled this scene many years later, it seems that it was from this point onward that his name becomes three-dimensional in her mind. He was no long just that big boy at the tournament wearing a black cap, with a calm, indifferent expression, and rapid fingers flying all over the keyboard.

For a moment, Ai Qing didn't know how to greet him.

He suddenly grinned, seemingly to realizing who she is, but still remained silent.

"I'm Gou Gou (狗狗, Doggy)." ^[3] At last, she stretched out her right hand first.

His hand was wet as he quickly shook and released her hand. "Come to watch the game?"

Ai Qing grudgingly turned her head away. "I'm here for the Need for Speed finals."

"Oh," Dt replied while turning away from the door, signaling her to come in. "Is racing fun?"

"Quite fun. We can trade places if you want....."

If it wasn't for him, perhaps she wouldn't have had to settle on competing in a racing game?

As she pulled up her luggage, another boy came up behind Dt. "Man, Dt, we only just arrived and you're already hitting on the local beauties?" While talking, he quickly pulled off the bath towel on Dt, then ran away laughing.

Ai Qing was completely dumbfounded. She stayed at the doorway with her mouth wide open.

The loud lapping of the ocean waves came from behind embellishing this embarrassing moment.

Dt and Ai Qing locked their gazes for two seconds. Suddenly, a shout burst from inside the room, “Damn! Head shot again!” Dt quickly picked up the towel on the floor and wrapped it around his waist. “I’ll go change.”

He walked back into the room without saying anything, grabbed the pair of jeans on the bed, and disappeared into the bathroom.

[1]: Hua Ti (滑梯), is his username and literally means “slide,” like the slide on a playground kind of slide.

[2]: A [lei](#) if anyone wanted to know. I put this up because I didn’t actually know what that was.

[3]: Guo (狗) means dog in Chinese. 狗狗 (Guo Guo) is Ai Qing’s username and when 狗 is used in succession is usually used as a more cute way to talk about a dog, like saying “puppy” or “doggy.”

Chapter 2

God's Left Hand - Prelude: Chapter 2

Luckily, everyone in the room was playing CS with their headphones on, except that trouble making boy.^[1] No one else noticed that the great Dt had exposed himself in front of a girl, completely exposed.

Ai Qing, the other victim of the prank, sat on the bed pretending nothing had happened.

She silently kept repeating to herself, he's only 15, 15.....

Dt walked out of the bathroom when Slide came in with armful of McDonald's. Slide put the nighttime snacks on the table and knocked on it to grab everyone's attention. "This is Gou Gou, the second girl on our Chinese team. She could have been the black horse of our DotA team. Unfortunately, Dt had bluntly eliminated her at the Chinese Regionals."

Ai Qing dejectedly cast a brief look at Slide. Did you have to introduce me like this?

The boy who pulled the bath towel looked at Ai Qing surprisingly. "You are Gou Gou? That famous girl who always plays disablers?"^[2]

Slide tapped on the table with his index finger. "Not just disablers, she was quite famous a few years ago in CS, too. Her specialty is getting head shots through walls. Most players are out without realizing what had happened."

“Didn't CS get cancelled this year?”

“I'm here for the Need For Speed finals,” Ai Qing reluctantly repeated it again, “since I have nothing better to do.”

“Is racing fun?” The boy seemed really interested, asking while scratching his head, “You can call me Mian Bao (麵包, Bread). I'm the substitute on Dt's team. Sorry about what just happened.”

After the brief introduction, everyone gathered around the table and picked out their meals. Slide, being the one who already knew Ai Qing, introduced each one to her. She, not good at memorizing names, hastily nodded to everyone. The only one that she made an effort to remember was her roommate, a girl with short hair.

This young girl didn't seem to talk much. She was also a substitute on Dt's team.

Of all the competitive video games, only DotA is a 5 against 5 game. All the rest are played individually. Only the DotA teams need substitutes. Just like during a soccer match, the substitutes usually sit out the whole game on the cold bench.

But even the cold bench of the championship team is not for any ordinary gamer to sit on.

Ai Qing casually asked while looking over their computer screens, “Why don't you guys turn on the light?”

“Broken.” Dt picked up a cup of coke and put in the straw.

“Oh.” Ai Qing looked at him, shirtless, wearing only a pair of jeans. She couldn't help but recall that X-rated episode.

“My name is Wu Bai (吴白). Wu is the family name. Bai means white.” He said abruptly.

Everyone was in shock.

Even his own teammates didn't know his real name, Wu Bai, until tonight.

"Ai Qing." Ai Qing, who had just bitten into a hamburger, was so startled that she gave out her real name instinctively.

He nodded, walked back to the corner and put the headphones back on.

Today was a day off. Tomorrow is all ceremonies: first, the closing ceremony of the Singapore regional, then followed by the opening ceremony of the Asian Tournament. The official final rounds will start the day after tomorrow, Slide explained. "We don't often get a chance to come here. So we all agreed that after the three-day final competitions, we'll tour around a bit."

Ai Qing, with hamburger in her mouth, said unclearly, "I want to go see that world's number one ferris wheel."^[3]

"Ah?" Slide shot a glance at Ai Qing. "That's one of the 10 most popular proposing places in the world....."

"Uh, huh. Better stop right there. Wait till you're an adult, then we can talk about this."

"We won't have our official game until three days later," said the short hair girl with the straw in between her teeth, giggling, "let's play some friendly skirmishes?" Slide couldn't help chuckling, "That's a great idea."

Ai Qing was suffering from a slight headache from her lengthy flight. "I'm just here for the race, I don't think I really need any skirmishing."

"Training partner. Can't get any better training partner than this!" Slide patted her back, said craftily, "Look at this roomful of top notch players, it's a chance of the lifetime! Don't be fool by their playfulness, they're all eager to play some games all along."

Ai Qing sipped a mouthful of coke. She could see everyone in the room was obviously excited at the suggestion and had no choice but to compromise.

An area on the table was quickly cleared out. The members of the Chinese Regional championship team, right beside a bunch of McDonald's boxes, started to pick which map to play on.

Ai Qing took out her computer, and her own mouse, keyboard, and headphones.

She quickly glanced over at Wu Bai, who also had his headphones on, across from her. His keyboard was missing some troublesome keys.^[4] Truly a professional gamer.

She still remembered that scene from the final game when she lost to him that day.

She was late entering the arena. About 5 meters from her, he placed his feet on the desk and leaning backwards, rocking the chair back and forth. It seemed that this was his way to relieve stress from the competition. With his cap casting a shadow on his bowed head, she could only make out the part of his face below his nose. It was outlined by one gentle and smooth line, without any harshness.

It was that battle that marked Dt's rise to fame.

Ai Qing looked at his left hand on the keyboard; clean and neat fingers without anything special about them.

To keep the friendly skirmish friendly, everyone agreed to play CS which was not a game being hosted at this year's championship. After they

loaded up the map, everyone started to adjust the volume of their headphones and get warmed up.

Their calm and undisturbed pupils reflected the lights of the computer screens, without any interference.

Outside of the gaming arenas, they were all just students.

But at this resort, on a foreign soil, they were the top video gaming competitors representing China.

[1]: CS is the acronym of Counter Strike for anyone who doesn't know. It's a classic first-person shooter video game where 2 teams compete against each other. Its current incarnation is Counter Strike: Global Offensive.

[2]: In the video game Dota and Dota2, players choose heroes. Heroes are categorized by the type of role they perform on the team in-game. One of the categories is called "disablers" who support the team by incapacitating enemy heroes allowing their teammates to kill the enemies.

[3]: The author actually makes a mistake here. The story takes place in 2007, but The Singapore Flyer (the ferris wheel she's talking about) didn't open until 2008. It was the tallest in the world until 2014 where a larger one was built in Las Vegas. So though the ferris wheel did exist in 2007, I doubt it was one of the top proposing spots until it opened.

[4]: ED note: I follow professional gaming loosely and I'm not sure if pro gamers actually remove keys from their keyboard. For some games you need lots of keys to perform multiple actions, but possibly for some games that require few keys, removing keys would make sure that you wouldn't hit the wrong key.

Chapter 3

God's Left Hand - Prelude: Chapter 3

Translator's note: Sorry for being late, the auto-poster didn't work for some reason. ㄟ (' ▽ `) ㄟ

Here you guys go.

Facing off against these ace gamers, death usually happened in an instant.

After one minute and 37 seconds, the last player took off their headphones.

Mian Bao gulped down some coke. “Gou Gou, exactly how good is your hearing? You ambushed me just when I started to move.”

Ai Qing stuck her tongue out, taking a quick look at Wu Bai.

He unexpectedly backed out of the game toward the end, without any explanation.

“It’s not hearing, it’s her sense of smell.”

“That’s why Gou Gou makes her name; her sense of smell of always knowing where the enemy is,” Slide mumbled through the unlit cigarette in his mouth.

That was how a gaming website in China summed her up when she was 15.

If she remembered correctly, that was another international competition three years ago, the ESWC Electronic Sports World Cup.

It was the Chinese Regional that year and all the top teams were gathered in Guangzhou from all over China. After two solid days of fighting, she won her first competition in her professional career.

Her specialty is in close quarters combat, particularly with a knife. She didn't switch out her knife for the entire match.

In this kind of face-to-face, instant death confrontations, a player has to be merciless and relentless to survive.

Her fierce fighting style was taught hands-on by one person. But it was after that competition, she and that person gave up on professional CS.

All eleven people sat around making fun at each other. To be exact, it was ten people. The only one not participating in the group conversation was Dt. After he backed out of the game, he sat down near the outdoor bar, looking at a video of the qualifying games earlier that year.

Everyone was tired from the whole day long distance traveling, plus the 5 - 6 hours of intense training after settling down in the resort.

Even though they were having fun with each other, they were obviously tired.

Only he didn't have any sign of fatigue. With a glass of ice water at hand, he put an ice cube into his mouth silently. He was fully concentrated on the video with headphones on, his eyes didn't stray away from the screen. She felt her teeth freezing just by looking at him. She wondered why such a loner would choose to play a team game like DotA, instead of an individual game.

He was a person that had come from nowhere, who led a not so famous team, but their skills and strategies were absolutely amazing. As the captain, he was undoubtedly the final decision maker. No one would be surprised if he was a veteran player, but, he was a newcomer, just 15 years old. A newcomer with a bright future.....

Without a doubt, after this Asian Tournament, many top teams would be chasing after him.

“How do you guys communicate with each other when you do your normal training?” She asked Mian Bao quietly, “ He doesn’t seem to talk too much.”

Mian Bao thought a bit. “We just need to listen.....”

Chapter 4

God's Left Hand - Prelude: Chapter 4

Sorry for being a bit late. Finals is coming around the corner. Once summer hits we'll be able to post more often.

Ai Qing was sharing a room upstairs with the other girl from Dt's team.

Tossing and turning, she just couldn't fall asleep in the middle of the night. Afraid that she'd wake up her roommate, she simply walked out of the room. She walked to the staircase and sat down. From this angle she could see the ocean.

The ocean lapped onto the beach, wave after wave in the darkness.

Suddenly, her arm felt ticklish. She looked down, two cats had come from who knows where. They sat quite elegantly right next to her. When she looked over, they also looked up at her at the same time. Ai Qing chuckled and whispered, "Are you brothers? Sisters? Or lovers?"

The two cats looked at her for a while, then turned to look at the sea.....

These seaside cats..... What characters.

Ai Qing grinned, turned her head back up to look into the darkness with the cats.

A short while later, the sounds of footsteps grew near. "Is the view

good?”

The voice felt very familiar. She turned around and saw Dt already kneeling behind her. He gazed at the cats and used his fingers to tickle them.

“Are you asking me or the cats?”

“You.”

He sat down on the other side of the step, shoulder to shoulder with Ai Qing with the two cats in the middle.

“The seaside at home is much better. After you are tired of looking at the sea, there’s all kinds of BBQ to eat.” She spoke casually. “Today, did you get disconnected, or did you back out of the game on you own? Are you afraid of close hand-to-hand fighting with a girl?”

Toward the end of the skirmish they just played, she saw from her tab key^[1] which indicated that there were Dt and another person left in the game.

In her headphone, she could hear footsteps coming from two different directions. But after she headshotted one of them, the other set of footsteps suddenly disappeared.....at the same instance, the game notified that he had left the game.

He looked away. “I got disconnected.”

Because of the direction of the moonlight, his whole face was shadowed by his cap. She couldn’t make out of any expression on his face; but it seemed, maybe, to be a smile.

Ai Qing didn’t take any offense; after all, most boys who play video games are either talkative or withdrawn. She’s used to it.

“I watched the video of that game,” just as Ai Qing was giving up carrying the conversation, he began to speak, “that game three years ago when you were still a CS player. I’m still wondering, all this time, the reason why your team disbanded.”

Such a long, long sentence.

Ai Qing was amazed that he, at the age of 12, already followed these kind of competitions. She chuckled. “You were only 12 at the time? Don’t tell me that you started down this path of no return of video games because you worshipped me.”

Dt glanced over at her.

.....

Perhaps because she lost to him before, she was subdued by his intense aura and stopped joking with him. “You should have seen some of the discussions on various forums and the gossip. There is actually a simple explanation. Solo fell for Warcraft III.^[2] Just like his name, Solo, he doesn’t like to play with a team. He prefers fighting alone. Without the captain, our team had no choice but to disband.”

In the past, people always said that Solo was the soul of the team. If a team had him, total victory was ensured.

So this explanation should be acceptable to everyone. It’s quite reasonable, isn’t it?

Solo.

Ai Qing pursed up her lips. She remembered that he is the person always with a gentle smile. She stroked the cat next to her. “Too bad your focus is on DotA. Though if you played Warcraft III, he would be the last

person you'd want to fight against.”

“The WCG world champion, both last and this year?”

Ai Qing nodded. “Basically, he doesn’t play these Asian Tournaments. After this competition is over, there should be several international games in the latter half of the year. Maybe you will meet him then.”

[1]: In Counter-Strike (and many other competitive shooting games), pressing the tab key normally brings up a score board that also shows all the players in the game.

[2]: The translation isn't very clear here because it just says Warcraft in Chinese, from what I can tell. But Warcraft III is probably what they are talking about because you can compete by yourself in Warcraft III competitions. The game is a real time strategy game where you build a base and a small army to fight other players with their own base and army (in a nutshell).

Chapter 5

God's Left Hand - Prelude: Chapter 5

Sorry for being late. I pulled an all night for my art project and just slept so we're a little late today >.<. Upside, though school's over. We're hopefully going to be able to increase the number of releases we can make over summer. Enjoy!

Chapter 5

Their midnight conversation wasn't a very pleasant memory.

It was usually quiet and Ai Qing couldn't quite figure out what he was thinking like his teammates could.....therefore, she had to carry the conversation herself for a length at times. Finally, she couldn't keep it going anymore and used thirst as an excuse to go back to her room.

She didn't wake up till noon the next day. She was woken up by a phone call, reminding her to attend the Asian Tournament opening ceremony that afternoon.

She hung up the phone and hid her head inside the blanket to keep the glaring sunlight out. She struggled another 20 minutes before finally getting out of the bed. She truly did not want to go to any opening ceremony; speeches from the sponsors, promotions by young girls cosplaying, and routine interviews by the media from different countries.....the one thing she hated the most was that some of the foreign media would ask very

discriminatory questions. Questions like: We heard that you are from China; compared to other more advanced countries, China is somewhat behind in its computer fields. What kind of efforts have you put in to compete in the world level competitions?

Everytime this happened, she felt like smashing a keyboard into their faces and say:

Behind!? Like hell we are! The world's first returning WCG champion is Chinese!

Even Singapore couldn't play any new tricks to alleviate the boredom.

For example, the event that just left the stage.

Ai Qing listened to the many shouting fans sitting behind her. "Lin Junjie! Lin Junjie!" This singer, Lin Junjie, was invited by the organizer as a special guest. He energetically sang three songs and finally left surrounded by security guards.

But, all the contestants were dozing off. It's not that they were not respectful.

It's just that video games competitions in Asia are basically a man's world, except for an occasional female's team or two. Hardly any young man likes to hear these kind of pop songs.

A buffet was served after the ceremony.

"Gou Gou," Slide walked over holding a plate full of BBQ chicken wings and purposely lowered his voice. "I forgot to tell you one thing."

Ai Qing was tapping her forehead with a wet towelette trying to keep herself awake. “What?”

Slide was still hesitating, several contestants not far from them were whispering a name, “Solo”.

Ai Qing thought she had heard it wrong. But at the very next second, she realized that he was really here.

A lot of people stood up; looking for this man, who had swept through most of the world competitions and almost took down the title of grand slam^[1], with respectful gaze. Even some people from the strongest team, the Korean team, looked over at him.

Usually, these type of minor Asian competitions don't attract any world class competitors. No one expected to see Solo, ranked number 3 in the world, showing up here.

“See, I'm still too late.” Slide patted her shoulder. “He just asked me how you were doing lately. I didn't tell him that you're here. It's up to you whether to see him or not.”

After saying that, Slide leaned back on the chair and bit into a chicken wing.

Ai Qing didn't say anything. She quickly glanced over in the direction that everyone was staring at.

There were 3 or 4 tall men standing at a table.

That man, who attracted the attention of everyone, wore a simple pure white short sleeved polo shirt. With one hand inside his pants' pocket and head stooped down, he was talking and smiling with the person next to him.

[1]: Just so anyone is unfamiliar, such as the I, the editor, the term grand slam is normally used in sports to denote a person who has won all major tournaments (like in golf). So basically Solo almost won all the major pro-gaming matches.

Chapter 6

God's Left Hand - Prelude: Chapter 6

Alright guys. I've graduated (though I'm going to be attending school, again, in the fall). So now that it's summer we'll be updating weekly! Also sorry for the late posting again (I'm pretty bad at this). We just got home and the flight was delayed. Things are heating up from what I can tell in the story. Enjoy.

She still remembered that night.

They had just finished training, sitting in the room with the lights off. He was leaning back on the chair wearing headphones. She knew the music he was listening to must have been Within Temptation's "Jillian". That's his favorite band.

That year, all the forums and gaming websites liked to comment on her "sense of smell." Solo on the other hand always said that it was her women's sixth sense. She could foresee enemy positions or an incoming ambush.

But what she really wanted to know was that if she had a sixth sense, then she should be able to sense his feelings.

That day, the two of them sat across from each other. She hesitated for quite some time, finally she entered few words on computer: "Love, takes two people."

Solo's face reflected the light from the computer screen.

At first, he just smoked quietly. After a full 4 or 5 minutes, he slowly typed on the keyboard and punched the enter key: "So, Solo is not suitable for love."

Singapore at the height of summer is truly a sun-drenched place.....

The glaring sunlight came from the direction where he was standing. Ai Qing had to squint her eyes in order to barely see his face.

Those 3 or 4 men all looked familiar, but she couldn't recall who they were exactly. She only saw that, after a short conversation, a man behind him patted his shoulder and he raised his head looking toward another direction.

Ai Qing looked over too; it was Dt's team who sat at a table.

"Solo said that he came here to look for fresh blood for his club." The person that sat next to her explained unclearly while eating the chicken wings. "My guess is that he likes Dt. You know Solo's club has gotten an investment from an American company. If Dt can take the first place in this tournament, he will be a hot item. They do have foresight."

Ai Qing smiled. "Why don't you go to his club?"

"Me?" Slide shrugged. "I plan to go to Germany."

Ai Qing was quite surprised. "You already signed on with them?"

Slide looked at her smilingly. "Want to come with me?"

"No!" Ai Qing refused instinctively. "That place won't agree with me. If I want to sign on to any team, it'll be a Chinese club."

"The most presentable team in China," Slide took out a pack of tissues

from his pocket and pulled out one, “is Solo’s.”

It so happened that there came the hit song of Within Temptation through the speakers. It’s unexpected that there were people here who liked this Dutch symphonic metal band too.....

Ai Qing thought for a while, then finally spoke, “then I’ll just study hard in college. I’ll return to the world without video gaming competitions completely. Fall in love, work in an office after graduation, 9 to 5.”

Slide nibbled on a piece of chicken wing so thoroughly until there was only bare bones. “I almost forgot, you just finished the college entrance exam.”

Oh, yeah, entrance exam, college; it seemed that her life had just begun.

It seemed that Solo was doing exactly what Slide had guessed. After exchanging a few more words with the people around him, he walked, holding a can of coke in hand, towards where Dt was. As Ai Qing was thinking of finding an excuse to slip away, Mian Bao, right at this moment, realized that there were two people missing, searched all around and saw Ai Qing. He waved and shouted out, “Gou Gou, Slide, over here!”

Solo stopped, turned his head to look over.

Ai Qing felt her temples were tightening up. She wished she could flog that little substitute to death right now.....

Chapter 7

God's Left Hand - Prelude: Chapter 7

So I forgot that it was Saturday. My bad guys :<.

Solo kept smiling while she walked over. “What event?”

“Need for Speed.”

He’s amused. “Good event.”

Ai Qing chuckled. “And what brings you here?”

“I heard there are several strong teams in this tournament.” Solo drank some coke. “I saw the video of your game, do you plan to sign on with any team?”

Suddenly she realized that it wasn’t a casual talk when he had asked Slide about her current situation. Slide, who had witnessed the on-again-off-again relationship between her and Solo, was obviously leaning more on her side. She shook her head. “Not at the moment.”

As he was about to say something, some reporters interrupted. They had just discovered that here was a heavyweight gamer and all excitedly ran over to interview him. Ai Qing stepped back a few steps to give him more room.

The reporters didn’t ask those routine questions for a change. Instead,

they kept asking him whether he planned to switch teams. Whether he had received any invitations. Or whether he would leave China.

Solo listened carefully to all the questions, then said, “this year, we have 3 players ranked among the top 10 individual players in Warcraft III. I believe that number will increase in the future. In 2003, China has officially declared videogame competitions as a sporting event. Although we haven’t valued videogame competitions as much as Go or soccer like in Korea, our future development is very promising.” He smiled politely and said, “and if everything goes as expected, I will not leave this team before I retire.”

“In Europe and US, Warcraft III is not as popular as shooting games.” One reporter pointed out doubtfully, “some people even said that, in the future, Warcraft III will only be a recreational game in Korea and China. As the ranking number 3 player, do you feel like this is a concern?”

Solo was silent for a while, then said, “there is always a rumor that Blizzard Entertainment will push out a new game. If it’s attractive enough, I will be happy to try it out.”

Ai Qing watched the rare serious look on his face; all of a sudden, she felt that he was very far away.

He’s no longer that 19 years old teenager of the past.

After quickly sending those reporters away, Solo sat down naturally and started chatting with Dt. The two of them idly exchanged words; most of the time it was Solo who was asking the questions and Dt answering with one or two words or just agreed tacitly. She could tell that they knew each other from before.

It looked like that young girl, Ai Qing's roommate, was a die-hard fan of Solo. During this whole time, she was looking at him with twinkling eyes. After he was done talking with Dt, she chipped in, "Solo? You really are Solo?"

Solo nodded smiling. "Yes."

"You came here to seek out our captain?"

"You could say that." He drank some more coke and glanced at Ai Qing. "Also to see some old friends. Only at these kind of important tournaments do we ever meet. We don't have much of a chance to see each other back home since everyone lives in different provinces."

The young girl couldn't quite understand. "Can't you meet with them at the Chinese Regional finals?"

"I happened to be out of the country at the time." He patiently explained, then turned to Dt. "I checked the game schedules, DotA is on the last day. Do you want to play a warm-up game tonight?"

"Warcraft III?" Dt asked.

"Yes." Solo laughed. "Don't forget we got to know each other because of the Warcraft III. I'll invite some friends, tonight."

Dt didn't answer right away, Solo quickly dropped three names.

Ai Qing felt those names were familiar, but she wasn't following Warcraft III too closely. It was Slide, who just walked over behind her, gasped. "Such an impressive fighting lineup! Those Koreans on the top ten list? I remember these three were last year's number 6, 7, and 10?"

"It's them." Solo didn't deny it. "WCG is organized by Koreans. They always invite some professional gamers to come as special exhibition guests. This year it's these three; they should be here around dinner time."

"How do you plan to play?" Slide was very interested.

Ai Qing was also curious. Five of them, how did they plan to play the game?

“2 to 3.” Solo curved up corners of his lips, chuckled. “Just for fun.”

.....

This is Solo. Although he is ranked number 3, it's still quite daring to challenge the three top gamers just by team up with one another player who's not even a Warcraft III contestant.

“What time?” Finally Dt showed some interests.

“10 o'clock.”

Chapter 8

God's Left Hand - Prelude: Chapter 8

Ok so I think I might start posting these Friday night if I can't figure out why this scheduled post doesn't work. I also need to really fix my sleep schedule and wake up earlier than 11. Enjoy today's chapter!

So a game fought by heavyweights was played at the night before the official tournament started.

Solo lived in the village, too. With the courtesy of the organizer, his room was larger than the contestants' and came with a living room. When those Korean gamers arrived at his room, they used English to greet each other warmly. When Solo introduced Dt to them, they seemed to have heard his name before. They carried conversations in low voices for quite a while.

Ai Qing was somewhat surprised.

When they were all busy preparing their computers, Ai Qing asked Slide quietly, "do you understand Korean?" Slide shook his head smilingly. "Can't even deal with English, not to mention Korean." Ai Qing gave it a thought, asked again, "this Dt, has he played other events before?"

"Don't know." Slide shook his head. "He shouldn't have. Based on his age, he should have just started competing."

Ai Qing didn't ask any more. She sat on the sofa on one side of the room and watched those 5 chat away happily. Sometimes, they would use broken Chinese mixed with English to chat with Solo. Korea and China are the two strongest countries in the Warcraft III. Many top players from both

countries are good friends. This is probably the so-called like-minds cherish each other.

“How is it?” Solo looked at Dt.

Dt made an ok gesture.

Mian Bao couldn't contain himself any longer; he sighed lightly, “God, can I take a picture? These are all idols.”

She was amused by it and looked over. “Work harder. Then you'll be the one in the pictures in the future.”

“Talent isn't something you can force.” Mian Bao pushed up his glasses, admiringly looked over to the not so far away gamers. “I feel that our captain is very promising. When he reach his professional peak around 18, 19 years old, he'll definitely sweep all over the 5 continents.”

“.....isn't it 7 continents?”

“.....” Mian Bao thought carefully. “It seems”

While the two were talking, the players were all ready.

Before they started the game, Solo suddenly chuckled. He sighed, in English, in a low voice, “What's going on today? Everyone plays Human.”

Immediately, one of the Koreans laughed and followed by, “there's one exception. Your teammate is random.”

Random?

Ai Qing watched Dt surprisingly. In Warcraft III, there are four different

aces, each player usually plays their favorite.

Even though this is not Dt's event, it takes unusual courage to choose random when facing the four top ranking gamers in the world.

"Random is quite normal." That die-hard fan of Solo proudly murmured. "Our captain always chooses random, no matter what game....."

Ai Qing and Slide looked at each other, suddenly had the feeling that tonight's "just for fun" would turn out to be quite spectacular.

She unconsciously looked up and down at Dt. Dt seemed to sense something, raised his head suddenly and glanced over in the direction of the sofa. With this tiny change of position, the other players felt kind of strange and, following him, turned to look toward this direction.

The people who sat on the sofa were all confused. They didn't know what all these idols, suddenly turning towards their way, were looking at.

Chapter 9

God's Left Hand - Prelude: Chapter 9

Here's today's update! Enjoy.

Solo was the first one to look back at Dt. “What’s the matter?”

Dt also turned his head back to stare at the computer screen. “Just remembered that someone had told me that if I chose Warcraft as my event, you would be the opponent whom I don’t want to face the most.”

It was last night when they sat on the stairs in the middle of the night and had casually carried the conversation.

Solo smiled lightly and took a look at Ai Qing. “Likewise, likewise.”

There were no live broadcast on the big screen, no on-site play by play by international commentators, but this was truly a platinum-level battle.

Thanks to Solo, those Koreans didn’t mind being watched by onlookers.

Or one could say that for these gamers, once they are into the game, how many onlookers were there was no longer their concern. To these ace players, opportunities to come across other matching opponents were rare. Naturally, they were utterly focused.....Ai Qing walked over behind Solo. His fingers on the left hand hadn’t paused even for a second; a perfect keyboard operation.

Ultimate talent on keyboard operation, that’s the praise he received most often in recent years.

“God, if there is an APM count, I swear, Solo’s has passed 400 for sure.” The young girl behind was almost breathless. “Mian Bao, you think it’s reached 400? Has it?”

Mian Bao was also quite shaken by what he saw. “It should.....have.”

Ai Qing pursed up her lips, her heart was unexpectedly racing, too.

APM. Action Per Minute.

This is the most favorite statistics of Warcraft fans^[1]: the amount of keyboard operations per minute.

Of all the competitive video games, only Starcraft and Warcraft have this kind of harsh operation requirement.

All the master players basically maintain around 300 to 400 APM throughout the game. In other words, on average, they will give 300 to 400 commands per minute through the keyboard..... that was the sounds from those five players’ keyboards, sometimes loud sometimes low. On the screen, there were fierce battles already in some areas. Even for people who, like her, didn’t play Warcraft often could feel the excitement.

She had watched Solo mentioned in some interviews that he trains 15-16 hours a day without any interruption. He always drills the agility of his left hand whenever possible. He has said that he’s not a talented gamer, and made it up by practicing everyday to maintain his skill.

.....

The young girl, with her hands over her heart, couldn’t control her

emotions. “In a video of Solo’s WCG World Final game last year, there’s a moment when his APM surpassed 1100. That’s the statistic; 1100 commands per minute.....” Ai Qing was listening to her attentively. Without any warning, on the screen, there came an encircled fighting out of nowhere.

The young girl suddenly covered her mouth. “Solo.....”

Solo finally couldn’t help but laughed. “Not yet 1000.”

Ai Qing slowly exhaled and intuitively turned to look at Dt.

But before she could see clearly of his operation, she heard a slight noise abruptly. One of the Koreans across had dropped the mouse. With hands on the back of his head, he exclaimed to Dt using rather awkward Chinese, “You are great!”

Everyone looked at Dt amazed.

What kind of bizarre strategy that can kick a player out of the game without making any fuss?

[1]: ED comments: Don’t forget us Starcraft fans! We like APM too =3. Also a note to anyone who doesn't play RTS (real time strategy) games, APM isn't a perfect reflection of skill because a majority of the orders are repetition of orders already given. Though an average of at least 200-300 is usually needed to play on a professional level.

Chapter 10

God's Left Hand - Prelude: Chapter 10

Ok so right now it's 8:37PM PDT, Friday 6/17/16. I have scheduled this to publish on Saturday 6/18/16, 11AM PDT. Hopefully this actually publishes, if not you'll know because I'll post a small edit under this to tell you how sad I am that either this scheduling thing doesn't work or that I'm just so incompetent I don't know how to schedule this properly.

Anyhow enjoy guys.

EDIT: So uhhh scheduling didn't work.... sowwy

The final result didn't surprise Ai Qing.

The moment that Solo had lightheartedly said that it was just for fun, she knew that he had at least 70% certainty of winning. He had always been a qualified captain, having never made an uncertain decision.

After the game, Slide thoughtfully ordered a case of local beer. The average age of everyone was about 18 or 19. Even though many of them carried the aura of professional players, but when they raised the 330ml beer bottles, they were still just a bunch of youngsters. Dt even smiled somewhat bashfully when the others

pushed him to drink. He only symbolically touched his bottle with Solo's and took a sip.

Solo left the next day. It was the day of the final competition of Ai Qing's Need for Speed event.

She was the only one who had an event on the first day of the tournament. Most of her teammates stayed in the cabin room for some high intensity training.

At the outskirts of the arena, there were all kinds of cosplayers; many of them were in Warcraft costumes. Ai Qing sat inside of the arena and quite happily watched the cosplayers. A Singaporean staff member came over and gave her the grouping arrangements. They said it was based on random drawings amongst the 10 plus players to decide on the match up. "This is random?" Slide took the chart out of her hand and looked at it.

"I don't think so." Ai Qing pointed at the group of the Singaporean contestants. "The opponents for the three Singaporeans are all from weaker countries. Mine is the champion from the last Asian Tournament."

The two looked at each other.

The organizer's tricks were quite obvious to a discerning mind.

Ai Qing wasn't too concerned; Need for Speed didn't have that many fans in China anyway. But if this were Dt's event, then for sure no one would agree if the organizer still operated

underhandedly.

Slide probably also thought about this. He hesitated for a few seconds. “Should we protest to the organizer?”

Ai Qing was hesitating, too.

Not far from them, teams from other countries were also quietly discussing; Korean, English, and many unknown national languages. It seemed that everyone was not satisfied with the organizer secretly making the grouping arrangement.....When she looked back, she realized that not only Slide was here, Dt also skipped training and sat outside the arena waiting to watch the competition.

He seemed to have seen the facial expressions of Ai Qing and Slide. He quickly stood up and walked towards them.

Dt’s team was the seeded team of this year’s DotA. Even the commentators on the platform were surprised to see Dt here. No one would reckon that he could have the leisure to come and watch a racing game.

He didn’t pay attention to the gazes and quickly walked to their side with question marks in his eyes.

Slide hugged his shoulder. “We found something fishy about the organizer. Strong team against strong team. All the weak teams were matched with the Singaporean team.”

Dt frowned slightly, but didn’t speak.

Ai Qing thought about it for a while and decided to use herself as the bait. “I’ll personally protest it, without dragging you guys into it as much as possible. It’s not good to the team if we protest too

strongly.”

Protests usually end up hard to stop halfway.

If the organizer was unyielding, there were cases where contestants were forced out of the competition. She totally didn't want the whole Chinese team be forced out of the tournament.

Slide raised his eyebrows and asked with a phony smile, “You're giving up that US \$1,600.00 award?”

Ai Qing waved her hand, pretended to be unconcerned and said, “that's the award for the first place winner. How can you be sure that I'll take the first place? Furthermore, once I start protesting, the other countries will join in for sure. Who wants to let the organizer get away with it? The opponent of the Malaysian contestant is second place from the world championship. They're definitely not happy about that.”

Slide quieted down and seemed to consider the possibility of that happening.

Ai Qing had made up her mind. If worst came to worst, she could just pretend that she had come here for a free tour. Her real event was DotA after all.

She took down her name tag, jokingly patted Dt's arm. “All the DotA fans back in China are all watching you guys. Don't hurt our feelings.” After saying that, she stood up naturally.

It was unexpected when she was pushed back into her seat by Dt.

He readily took down the name tag hanging from his neck and raised up his right hand to get the attention of the people on the

platform.

The whole arena quieted down instantly.

All of the contestants, who were still discussing whether it was wise to protest, at that moment, glanced over at the 3-member Chinese team.

Chapter 11

God's Left Hand - Prelude: Chapter 11

Someone ran down the platform right away and asked Dt what was the problem.

Dt simply explained the question they had about the matching. The staff member was somewhat surprised and lower the voice to make sure that Dt wasn't a contestant of the Need for Speed event. Dt gave his name tag to the staff. "We have only one contestant in this event, it's a girl. In China, when under this kind of situation, a man will come before her."

Ai Qing was somewhat stunned. But Dt spoke matter-of-factly.

Slide couldn't help smiling and took down his name tag also to hand it over to the staff. "I'm the captain of the Chinese Team. We have objections about the way grouping is arranged. We hope the organizer can hold an open drawing to show fairness."

Ai Qing naturally handed out her name tag, too.

The staff quickly ran back to the platform with the three name tags in hand. But before he had finished reporting back to his superiors, many contestants from other countries stood up one after another. While they were protesting, they turned to greet the three smiling.

"Usually, there is not much result out of this kind of protesting." Slide kept smiling and nodding back while talking in a quiet voice. "This is a commercially sponsored competition after all. We are in their country, too, so prepare for the worst."

Dt, with both hands in his pants' pockets, was quietly lost in thought.

Slide noticed that he wasn't saying a word and, after a moment, asked what was on his mind. After thinking a bit more he replied, "I'm thinking about our strategy for the day after."

Slide gave Ai Qing a look and silently mouthed, "Do you see why you lost to him now?"

Ai Qing looked back with a sense of helplessness and mouthed, "He's a genius."

After protesting, the crowd returned to their seats, some happy and others concerned.

The organizer was adamant about its position. Because the tournament for today was about to begin soon, there was no time to change the matchups. However for the next two days, the organizer agreed that the matchups would be decided randomly by machine. Ai Qing, very pleased with this result, placed her name tag back around her neck. "Relax, I'm also a seeded player."

Dt chuckled while patting her on the back, "Don't stress about it too much."

Ai Qing, tilted her head and pursed her lips. "Do you know why I started played DotA originally?"

Just ten minutes before the game, she decided to suddenly talk about the past.

Dt replied with a curious look.

"I read a post on an international DotA forum one day; they said that Chinese players were terrible and not even worth mentioning. Even when Chinese players posted their best videos, they just laughed and said that it was a video for beginners to learn from." She looked up at the stage and continued, "Two years ago, Singapore always talked about how much better they were than China. But look at today, they're too afraid to compete in the same group against us."

She lowered her head and began to connect her mouse and keyboard to

the computer that was provided by the competition. “Dt, even though I lost at DotA to you, that doesn’t mean I’ll lose at Need for Speed to these guys.”

The sides of Dt’s lips curled into a smile, his mirth was even reflected in his eyes, a rare sight in him.

Slide gave a short laugh. “Just by looking at you, it seems like you’ll be taking the first gold medal for us?”

Ai Qing raised her head up, placed her headphones on, and replied with an “ok” gesture.

In a competition, even if you’re just a teenager, you can’t loudly complain about what you perceive as unfair and wait for someone else to fix it. But if you have the skills, then even an unfair matchup is inconsequential.

Chapter 12

God's Left Hand - Prelude: Chapter 12

Hey guys, here's this week's! Enjoy.

She had never played a final round this difficult. Her first match was against last year's champion.

She knew the maps in Need for Speed 10 well enough that she could have drawn them with her eyes closed. However, every single contestant was just as familiar with the maps as she was.

Bend after bend on the road, her finger never left the shift key.

Every time, as she was about to bump into an opponent's car, she would overtake them while barely grazing the car.....

It's a good thing that she had spent two months training to avoid crashing. Last year, many Chinese Need for Speed players were knocked out of the international competition early on, all because they weren't familiar with competition rules.

In China, a rematch is required if a player overturns their opponent's car.

But in WCG tournaments, there is no penalty for purposely crashing into another opponent's car, making it a viable strategy for players.

Surprisingly, her left hand was a bit sore after she took it off the

keyboard.

This was only the first match and she had just won by only a narrow margin. She glanced at the Singaporean players for the next match and gritted her teeth as she gathered her belongings and left the competition floor.

Match after match, semifinals, and finals.

There was still, however, half a day to get through.....

“Look at this post,” Slide turned his laptop towards her with the most easy going posture to take her mind off the stress. “Yesterday, someone took a picture of you and posted on the CS boards.”

Ai Qing placed her bag down at her feet, sat down, and carefully looked at the computer screen.

The picture was a side-view of her yesterday, dozing on the back of the chair in front of her. The caption was very clickbaity “The Ancient Hero of Legend: Gou Gou makes a surprising appearance at the WCG Asian Championship.”

Ancient.....

Ai Qing wasn't sure if she should laugh or cry as she looked at Slide. “Since when did I become an ancient legend?”

Slide nodded with a grin: “More like a fossil at this point.”

.....

Ai Qing took a look at the big screen, the next match hadn't started yet. There was still time for her to rest. She commandeered the laptop to read the post.

In short, it was about the strongest first generation Chinese CS players.

“That year, Solo, Gou Gou, and Gun, *etc.* became the most iconic of the first generation CS players. This team almost swept every CS competition in China, becoming unchallenged champions.....”

Slide on purposely read the post out loud. She turned towards him with a fist raised, daring him to continue. He acquiesced with a chuckle. “I remember that back then I was still a commentator, before you guys dragged me into actually playing.”^[1]

Ai Qing also remembered that time three years ago, when most players were still amateurs. It was rare to find a professional team.

She was lamenting the fact that she was already considered “ancient” at the age of 18 as she casually looked at all the replies to the post.

She didn’t expect that around the twentieth reply she would start seeing gossip. They were all using this post to gossip about the CS teams at that time such as match fixing, the promiscuity of the players in their private life she read for a few minutes before she couldn’t hold back her laughter. The gossip here was more interesting than the ones about the entertainment industry in the gossip section of Tianya^[2].

But later on, someone began posting about Solo’s personal life.

Perhaps it was because he changed games and his skills still shone just as brightly if not brighter.^[3]

There was a very brief reply that mentioned his illegitimate daughter.....

Ai Qing immediately returned the laptop and didn’t want to continue with that topic.

After she chatted with Slide for a while, she discovered that Dt, who had

been silent all this time, had fallen asleep. Because his hat was pulled down so low, even Slide, his neighbor, didn't realize he had dozed off.

Ai Qing bent over to take a peek at his sleeping face with a smirk.

The outline of his face was beautiful. He definitely had the potential with his skills and looks to become one of the top gaming idols. She assumed that he probably trained too late into the night which would explain why he brazenly slept on the tournament floor. Really now why did he get up so early for?

[1]: TL Note: In Chinese the term used was “拖下水” which means literally to “drag into the water,” but it's connotation in English sounds more negative than what Slide is implying here.

[2]: From what we could research, Tianya (天涯) is a real website on the internet with a gossip/tabloid like section, but didn't look too deeply into it.

[3]: We chose to stick to a more literal translation here. The Chinese used implies that Solo was still eye-catching or had an aura around him that shone. Essentially they mean that even though he switched games, he was still one of the top players in his new game.

Chapter 13

God's Left Hand - Prelude: Chapter 13

Ai Qing straightened her back and mouthed to Slide, “Should we let him go back to sleep?”

Slide shook his head with a smile and mouthed back, “Just let him sleep like this.”

In the end, he slept until Ai Qing had finished the final round. She was swarmed by the media on the floor with the other finalist, assaulted by the flash of cameras. She saw Dt and Slide waiting in the back for her and impulsively kissed her gold medal hanging on her neck.

Slide immediately understood her actions and replied with a thumbs up.

Dt also quickly replied with a smile.

Because of this first gold medal, the Chinese team decided to have a grand feast in celebration.

Naturally the one paying was Ai Qing, because all of today's glory belonged to her. She followed the team down to city hall by subway, even though her account was in the red and had no idea when she could collect her prize money.

After these eleven people got off the subway, they became very excited. Each of them took out a camera from their backpacks and pockets. They even took multiple pictures with the fountain in front of the subway entrance. They were acting like a bunch of teenaged tourists.

Ai Qing forgot her camera, but since her friends were having such a

good time taking pictures, she kind-heartedly became the photographer for the group. She was taking pictures nonstop for each one of them. Slide stood beside her and gave a sigh, “Take it, take it, after this tournament everyone will probably go ashore^[1] and start studying seriously. Even if you have the best technique, you still can’t beat reality~”

Ai Qing clicked the shutter and glanced back at him, “Maybe we have a rising pro here.”

“Do you mean Dt?”

“It seems that you have a special spot for him?” Ai Qing looked at the picture she just took, a little blurry she could only grin at the four boys who had finally formed four letters, “Let’s take it again my hand shook a bit”

The four guys whined while beating their chests and tried to form the letters again.

“I like him a lot, I’d take him in a heartbeat, but I can’t beat Solo.”

“Oh,” Ai Qing acknowledged and knelt down to take a photo from below to make four big boys look even taller than they already were.

Because her skirt was long and even though the hem was curled upwards, one side still fell onto the ground. Compared to those four boys making funny postures, her pose was like a beautiful figure from a painting.

Slide squinted his eyes and said no more.

When he first saw Ai Qing, back when he was still a commentator, her hair was a short medium length.^[2] After every match, she’d rest her head in the crook of her elbow on the desk next to her keyboard and quietly talk to Solo who sat next to her.

Back then she was only 15. When the game became especially tense,

her cheeks would turn red. A lot of fans nicknamed her the “Apple Dog.” Perhaps she didn’t know it, but she rarely smiled in any of the pictures that was taken of her, except in the photos that had Solo in it.

“What’s that?” She returned the cameras to their respective owners and noticed two girls walking by with some sort of food that looked like bread that had something inside, in short it was strange.

“Cold drink,” Dt said abruptly who had so far been a bystander observing the fun.

Ai Qing took a careful look at the food and said, “The outside is toast isn’t it?”

Dt replied, “Un, the inside is a brick of ice cream.”^[3]

“Have you eaten it before?” she turned to look at him. While doing so, she took her long skirt and tied it into a knot above her knee, turning it into a super mini skirt.

Dt was silent for a bit before nodding in response.

“Does it taste good?”

He remained silent again as Ai Qing stared at him. In truth she wasn’t very interested in the ice cream sandwich itself, but felt that if she could get him to speak more, then it’d give her a great sense of accomplishment.

Under her intense glare, Dt finally broke his silence and earnestly asked her, “Do you want to eat one?”

Huh?

.....

“Then we can try some.”

[1]: The Chinese used here literally means going onto the shore, but

obviously he's using it as a metaphor for most of the team focusing on their studies rather than continue playing video games professionally.

[2]: He says short medium hair... whatever that means? I guess medium length hair that's on the shorter end of the spectrum?

[3]: ED: So basically an ice cream sandwich? Why would they use the Chinese for "cold drinks"?! Dt you are a strange guy... or the author doesn't know what to call it... Also note that the sound "un" means yes.

Chapter 14

God's Left Hand - Prelude: Chapter 14

Enjoy guys!

Because of Ai Qing's endless curiosity, Dt bought 11 ice cream sandwiches for everyone to try. Everyone was staring at her in awe, their silent praise made Ai Qing wanted to elicit more verbal responses from Dt.

The group then walked in the direction of the ferris wheel. Ai Qing, while eating the ice cream sandwich, on purposely walking next to Dt and chatted with him.

“Look at that building, the one full of spikes on the outside in a semicircle. Does it look like anything to you.....”

“The shell of a durian.”^[1] Dt said as he rose his head to take a look.

“When did you start competing?”

“When I was 12.”

“Are you prepared to be a professional? Keeping playing DotA? Or do you want to wait for some new game to come out?”

“I haven't decided yet.”

Ai Qing was having fun with the conversation, but once she began to talk about the esports, she unconsciously became more and more serious.

“Most pros focus on two games at the same time, like Warcraft III and Starcraft. When you attend more tournaments, you’ll learn that this kind arrangement works out very well. For example, say a game loses popularity over time, then you still have another game as backup. If you’re good enough, you can compete in both games in the World Tour^[2] tournaments. And if you win a prize at each one, you’ll become a rich man before you hit 20.”

Dt didn’t respond.

Ai Qing finished her ice cream sandwich and continued to think about what else to say. She wanted to continue the conversation, but felt that perhaps she was being a bit too attentive towards him. Just as she began to slow her pace down to discuss where they were going to eat with Slide, Dt suddenly spoke again.

“What about you?”

“Me?” Ai Qing thought about it for a bit, “I don’t know still. I might continue, or I might not.”

Afterwards, he became silent again.

Because it’s so rare for them to come to Singapore, none of them had a strong desire to sit somewhere to eat. So they snacked from here and there as they waited in line for more than one hour to get onto the ferris wheel.

Ai Qing leaned against the window and watched the skyline lighted up against the backdrop of the night. Others next to her were quickly changing poses for multiple pictures, inevitably the constant chatter was almost headache inducing. When she turned around, Dt was being used as a backdrop by several people. The entire skyline was right behind him and emitted a soft glow.

Not only were they sitting on this carriage, but also many other tourists who were looking at these student-like passengers.^[3] Inevitably they asked the group what their profession was, assuming that they were students traveling for the summer. Mian Bao very seriously explained to them about esports tournaments, which caused all the adult tourists to stare dumbfoundedly with their mouths agape. When speaking about games, of course many people play video games, but those willing to play to a higher degree of skill were rare.

“That,” Mian Bao proudly pointed at Ai Qing, “is this year’s Need for Speed champion in Asia.”

Everyone quickly looked at her. Ai Qing, before she could even realize what was happening, began to blush. Without knowing what was going on, the tourists began to take pictures with her. Some of them were very excited while others were just joining in on the fun. Still others joined in because Ai Qing was very beautiful, so why not later even Slide decided to have fun with it and handed his camera to a girl, “Take a picture for the three of us.”

After Slide finished, he snatched Dt’s cap, and placed an arm around his shoulder, “Handsome guys should show their face more.”

Dt always wore his cap, except when he came out of the shower, and used it to cover the upper half of his face. In this moment, with his cap taken off, even his own teammates were shocked at what they saw. They all began to say in agreement that the captain is very handsome.....

Dt gave an embarrassed cough, “A man doesn’t rely on his looks, but his skill.”

Though he originally said it in a very serious tone, but it caused everyone to immediately praise him even more.

Dt finally gave up and remained silent, pretending as if he had never said anything.

Slide, with a smile, casually placed the cap onto Ai Qing's head. And with his other hand around her shoulder, the three of them, close together with the lights from the skyline at their backs, was captured in a picture.

When they finally arrived back at the resort at night, the organizer had quickly sent over the time for the drawings for their matchups.

Because it was drawn by a computer, even though the DotA competitions were scheduled for the third day, the matchups would be decided by drawing tomorrow. The organizer gave them a website which all the team captains could use to check the final result.

Ai Qing's main interest was in DotA and so naturally she was very nervous about the matchups.

A few of them crowded around Dt's computer and waited for some time, until the results finally came. Their opponent was Thailand.

"Thailand placed second place in last year's Asia Tournament." Ai Qing said while looking at Dt. "Do we have a video of last year's competition? I remember that their strategy was abnormal. They would sacrifice four of their own team to drag their enemy down so that the fifth could go in for the kill."

It seemed that Dt was deep in thought considering this new information. He casually clicked on his computer for the information he needed.

Ai Qing focused her attention on his folders, of which he had over a hundred. She suddenly saw a name and became stunned for a moment before quickly looking at Dt.

"Apple Dog," that was her name.

Dt continued, apparently without noticing her, and quickly scrolled past that folder, his attention focused unwaveringly at the monitor.

[1]: A common tropical fruit found in a good portion of southeast Asia (such as Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, etc.). It has a pungent smell and, in my opinion, an acquired taste.

[2]: The Chinese used here is 巡回比赛 which translates into “World Tour,” but I’m not familiar with any esports competition called that. Though I don’t follow the esports as much as I used to when I played Starcraft three-four years ago.

[3]: Damn, that’s a HUGE carriage for a ferris wheel.

Chapter 15

God's Left Hand - Prelude: Chapter 15

We're almost finished with the prelude guys. After chapter 19 we'll move onto the next act.

Ai Qing thought that something was strange, but didn't think much of it.

After all, in this group of players, most of them were skilled at playing more than two games.

So having videos of her old matches wasn't out of the ordinary. She was one of the best competitive players back in the day after all.

After returning to the hotel room, she was so exhausted that she immediately fell into the bed and fell asleep.

Around 3 or 4 in the morning, Ai Qing awoke to see her roommate, the younger girl, had finally returned, taken off her shoes, and was trying to quietly make her way to the shower. Ai Qing lazily clutched her blanket and asked in scratchy voice, "What strategy has Dt decided on?"

The young girl saw that Ai Qing had awoken and breathed a sigh of relief. She tiredly sat on the edge of her bed. "The most energy intensive strategy."

"Pure gank?"^[1]

The young girl nodded in reply.

Ai Qing let out a long breath. A gank was the most exciting aspect of DotA. Ganking and anti-ganking. Ambushing and countering. When multiple players appear in a coordinated attack from the fog of war^[2] and after killing their opponents in a few seconds, quickly disappear back into the shadows. A well executed gank can change the rhythm of the battle, constricting the enemy with ambushes which can lead to the enemy's defeat.....

Ai Qing personally enjoyed watching videos of tournaments where ganking was the main tactic in the match, especially the Russian team. The intensity of their aggressive playstyle was on the same level as shootouts in an American film.

Thailand's main strategy concentrated on ganking, where they sacrificed four members of the team to protect the fifth. If the Chinese team played conservatively and maintained steady control, that would have been enough..... Ai Qing pondered about it for a while until her roommate had finished her shower and lamented, "The day after tomorrow will be a very exciting day."

She had seen many games where one side was on the offense and the other on the defense.

But when a team counters a strategy that focuses on ganks with their own ganks, it becomes an insane race as both sides take the offensive to see who gains the most kills. Just thinking about it would get anyone's blood boiling.

The next day was FIFA and 3D table tennis, as well as Slide's event: Starcraft.

Ai Qing woke up just early enough to make it for Slide's event. She wore the first short sleeve shirt and short jeans she saw and made her way to the stadium. In front of the big screen, two professional commentators were just then happily chatting with Slide, asking him if he was thinking about changing events when he joins the German pro-team. Slide held a cigarette between his lips and replied with a large smirk.

Ai Qing waved from faraway. Slide just noticed her from the stands. Two very tall men by her side greeted her with a "hello." Ai Qing smiled in reply. After they had introduced themselves, she was surprised to learn that they were members from the best Scandinavian team. Fortunately, Ai Qing graduated from a high school that was part of a university that specialized in foreign languages, so she had little difficulty communicating with them.

"Are you Chinese? Or Korean?" asked one of the handsome, blue-eyed man very slowly. "Sorry I have trouble differentiating asians from different countries."

"No problem. I'm Chinese." Ai Qing replied with a smile.

Scandinavia was a CS haven. Over half of all the professional CS players were from Scandinavia. So when she heard that these two were from Norway and Sweden respectively, she immediately had a good impression of them.

But, why would they come to watch the Asian tournament?

"Oh~" the handsome Norwegian nodded in understanding. "Do you know of a guy called Dt?"

Ai Qing nodded in surprised, "He's a member of the Chinese team, part of the DotA team. Do you know him?"

"Our team was thinking of establishing an Asian team to compete in DotA. Someone highly recommended him." The Swedish man, who had been silent so far, finally spoke and asked her, "Could you take us to meet him?"

[1]: To those who don't know what a gank is. In MOBA (multiplayer online battle arena) games like DotA, "gank" is the term used for the act when players ambush an enemy and gang up on them. Supposedly it can also mean gangbang kill, gang kill, or steal. The Chinese author makes a note that the Russian team Virtus Pro is famous for basically ganking across the entire map.

[2]: Fog of war is a term used for many strategy games, essentially your team can only see portions of the map in view of your team's characters and structures. The rest of the map is covered in a shadow or fog that shows the map, but doesn't show if any enemies are there until an allied character walks close enough to see it. Really you guys should just watch a DotA, DotA2, or League of Legends game on youtube to get an idea.

Chapter 16

God's Left Hand - Prelude: Chapter 16

In the end, Ai Qing didn't make it to Slide's match and instead brought the two handsome guys to meet Dt.

Perhaps it was because they trained late into the night, when Ai Qing knocked on his door, Dt was still half-asleep. His hair was dishevelled and clung to his forehead. After looking at them for a few seconds, he finally noticed the two Scandinavians and greeted them with a simple "hi."

After a brief introduction and a few words, the three of them were already on friendly terms. Competitive gamers all have similar temperaments. Others see them as proud or withdrawn individuals, but if you got to know them, you'd find that they were basically all kids who refused to grow up. Dt took out coke from the refrigerator for the two guests and they quickly began talking about CS.

Because Dt was younger and Asian, he wasn't nearly as tall as the two twenty-some years old men.

But when he stood with them, he didn't appear out of place.

The only thing that Ai Qing didn't expect was that Dt could speak English fluently as if it was his native language and just like the Swedish and the Norwegian, he spoke with a Scandinavian accent. In the past, when she watched interviews of the top players of the CS Scandinavian teams, she enjoyed listening to them speak. Their style of clothing and facial expressions always seemed cold, but when they spoke, they would always end their sentences with a rising inflection, which she thought was the cutest thing in the world.

Right now, she was watching it live.

Ai Qing sat on the couch and watched the three as they spoke under the sun on the balcony. The handsome Norwegian guy suddenly turned back to look at her for a second —— “Frigg.”

Frigg.

The term sounded very familiar, but Ai Qing couldn't put her finger on it. Dt seemed to smile as he hesitantly nodded in agreement.

“2v2.” The handsome Norwegian suddenly became excited as he walked back into the room and began taking out his computer from his backpack. “Do you have any interest in a friendly match?”

“CS? DotA?”

“CS,” the handsome Norwegian grinned, “I'm not that great at DotA.”

Ai Qing wouldn't have given up a chance to play with some of the best CS players, especially after she saw Solo and Dt beat those three Korean players. She very much wanted to have a taste of it herself.

Ai Qing agreed immediately on the spot and went to retrieve her laptop from her room.

They drew lots and Ai Qing found herself as Dt's opponent once again.

The cool Swedish guy was paired with the quiet Dt and the Norwegian became her teammate.

Before they had placed their headphones on, the Swedish player suggested that since it was a competition match, there should be a punishment for the losing side. The Norwegian immediately agreed with a chuckle and pointed at a plate of fruit. The losers would have to eat the entire plate.

The Swedish player disagreed and countered: “No, push-ups, 200.”

After he spoke, he added that the losers couldn’t turn on the air conditioning for their punishment.....

Push-ups?!

And no air conditioning? Ai Qing worrisomely looked at the her Norwegian teammate.

He gave a hearty chuckle and replied with a V sign. He rolled up his sleeves and put on his headphones.

Chapter 17

God's Left Hand - Prelude: Chapter 17

Finally, when Dt's teammates came by with their computers for practice, they came upon this historic scene.

Dt and the Swedish player were both doing pushups on the floor.

The two of them were expressionless in their mechanical motions as sweat dripped from their jaws onto the floor. Because the air conditioner was off, as per the punishment, the two of them had taken off their shirts from the start. When they reached a little over a hundred pushups, their backs were covered in sweat, which shimmered under the light.

"123, 124, 125," the handsome Norwegian counted excitedly from a chair in front of the two.

Ai Qing on the contrary was a bit worried if Dt could still compete tomorrow after 200 pushups.

Because Dt's teammates were DotAers and young teenagers, they were unfamiliar with the two Scandinavians. So they could only stare dumbfoundedly as the two finished their 200 pushups and timidly call out to their captain. Dt picked up his t-shirt from the bed and hastily wiped himself with it. "Give me 10 minutes. Let me take a cold shower"

Everybody nodded, watched as he walked into the bathroom, and immediately turned towards Ai Qing.

Ai Qing nervously smiled with a guilty conscience. “These two are CS players from Scandinavia, members of Team SK.”

The Norwegian was obviously in a good mood and spoke with his just-learned Chinese “Ni Hao (Hello).”

The young girl on the team followed Solo more closely, and thus knew more than the team about the CS scene, took an exaggerated breath. “An all-star team! Is our captain going to marry into an all-star team?”^[1]

.....

The Norwegian lightly smiled, but looked at Ai Qing cluelessly.

Ai Qing quietly translated for him, to which he nodded and told them that his team was very interested in recruiting Dt to organize an Asia DotA team under SK. Ai Qing responsibly translated, again, back to the team. Everybody was in a state of wonderment and one after another looked back at the bathroom.

At the age of fifteen, Dt had already attracted the best team in China and now an all-star Scandinavian team the average person at this age wouldn't have any idea about what they should and shouldn't do. Many of these people wouldn't have a grasp on the concept of their “future,” but Dt's professional career was already enviable.

The two Scandinavians exchanged contact information with Dt before leaving. Right before they left, when the Norwegian hugged Ai Qing to say his farewell, he happily said, “Goodbye Frigg.”

Ai Qing didn't know what in the world the name meant and quietly asked Dt, “What is Frigg?”

“In Scandinavian mythology, she's a goddess of love, Frigg.”^[2]

“Then what does that have to do with me?”

Dt was slightly taller than Ai Qing. When she looked at him, she had to raise her head up somewhat and saw an uneasy expression. It seemed that he hesitated for a while before speaking, “Just now when we talked about why I liked esport competitions, I told them that I passed by a place one summer and saw a girl competing there.”

From his expression, Ai Qing understood something and then suddenly couldn't believe it herself, “Don't tell me? Was it me? Did you really see that match three years ago in Guangzhou?”

Dt drank from his water bottle and finally nodded his head reluctantly.

She was in a state of astonishment in the beginning, which soon ended in laughter as she placed a hand on Dt's shoulder as support. “Good, then the person, who was chosen by China's top team and then by an amazing team like SK, turns out to have been influenced to start by me,” she saw Dt's face which was in obvious embarrassment. She suppressed her desire to continue teasing and happily asked, “Then why Frigg?”

Dt remained silent for some time before answering, “Maybe it's because you were the one who made me fall in love with esports.”

When he spoke these words, his voice was completely earnest.

[1]: She's being witty, I suppose, by literally saying that the team is “豪门” (hao men) which means roughly a “rich and famous family” or an “aristocratic family.” And uses the stereotype of how girls like to marry off into a wealthy and famous family, pretty synonymous with “gold digging” in English.

[2]: In this instance, Dt is using Frigg's Chinese name "弗丽嘉" (fu li jia), in all prior cases it was written in English. Also Frigg for those of you who don't know is the wife of Odin (father of Thor, that guy with the hammer). More info if interested => <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frigg>

Chapter 18

God's Left Hand - Prelude: Chapter 18

On the afternoon of the third day, the stands around the stage were packed with spectators.

Ai Qing sat in the first row and watched the five people on stage who wore black uniforms. Out of all the events after so many days, this event was the most anticipated.

A commander, skills and tactics, desire and passion, fast kills and teamwork, this was the unsurpassable charm of a team.

Do you stand at the top by yourself, or do you work side by side and challenge the boundary of skill?

Solo chose the former and for her, she had unconsciously leaned towards the latter.

Ai Qing watched as those five people sat on the stage in uniform, goofing around. The sight had an indescribable effect on her. When she had ended her CS career, she was quiet for two years because she couldn't find any satisfaction from any event. Until DotA gradually became popular in 2006. It was then that she found her way.

Compared to being the best player in a popular event by herself, she would rather train all night with her teammates. Throughout a competition, you can continuously hear the rage, the excitement, and finally the cheer after a final victory. All of these things ensnared players.

On the left side of the stage was the Thai team and wore deep red short sleeved uniforms. On the other side was Dt's team, with each member wearing a simple black short sleeved uniform. Even though the young girl

was a substitute, she wore the uniform as well and nervously sat next to Ai Qing's left.

"I know those two top commentators on stage." Slide whispered into Ai Qing's ear. "They speak like academics, not simple and straightforward. When people like myself, who don't know much about DotA, their commentary sometimes makes me fall asleep."

Ai Qing grunted in agreement. She opened a bag of chips and began to stuff herself. "It's good to be an academic, they can start with the background and history and then in the end you'll even know which team member has a girlfriend....."

"I never asked, what do you think about Dt?"

"....." Ai Qing glanced at him. How should she answer this question?

"His individual skill level?" Slide was watching the stage and didn't notice her facial expressions.

Ai Qing breathed a sigh of relief, "Very good, a genius. Positioning, items, last hitting, map awareness, teamwork, strategy, not a single weakness....." Even though she didn't want to praise the person who had beaten her, she couldn't help but sigh, "The most important factor is that their team is very stable. They haven't had any replacements in two years. For these kind of team based games like DotA, teamwork decides everything. Personal abilities, no matter how great, is still unable to beat five people, right?"

"Sounds about right.," Slide smiled and stroked her hair, "then in a little bit, I'll be relying on you to explain everything. I'm pretty sure that you'll be much more reliable than those two guys who're getting paid in American dollars."

Ai Qing gave a toothy grin and continued to eat her chips.

The first match went as expected; an aggressive gank strategy turned a normal match into a series of exciting climaxes one after another.

Mid-game ganks, the Thai team wasn't able to keep up. Their captain,

who sat at the outermost seat, began to roar in a low voice. While Ai Qing was quietly explaining to Slide what was going on screen, the one who just got killed set aside his mouse and stood up to cool his emotions down before picking his mouse back up for a comeback attempt.

“Look,” Ai Qing said excitedly, “that guy who just got killed, couldn’t take the heat, just like when I played. Dt always seems to appear at impossible places and quickly surrounds and kills you in less than ten seconds.”

She spoke as she looked towards Dt.

He sat at the innermost seat on the second row, with only half of his face visible in the space between two monitors. His lips were slightly pressed together in concentration.

The strategy of extremely aggressive play and total map control had won the applause of the crowd when the winning team became clear.

Ai Qing heard someone behind her continuously ask in excitement for the name of the Chinese team captain. Ai Qing suddenly remembered what Dt said the day before, “It’s because you were the one who made me fall in love with esports,” and couldn’t help but curl the edge of her lips up.

Wasn’t it something to be proud of?

No matter what you’ll do after retirement, if you have a moment where you’ve captured the praise of the crowd, then you shouldn’t regret all the sacrifices made to reach that point. When she began playing at the age of 14, she had seen a lot of defeat and resignation.

There is always a black cloud hovering over this profession, because everything they come into contact with or use in competition were called “games.”

Unfair, grief, and hard training.

From an outsider’s perspective, they were just addicted to video games. But at the same time, they were athletes, the same as professional divers, weight lifters, and short-distance runners, who had won medals for China.....

Ai Qing felt that she had wallowed too much in her own nostalgia; she put on her headphones and began to look for a song in her mp3 player.

She then felt someone had sat down next to her and turned to look.

“Shouldn’t you be thanking me? Letting you fall in love with video games?” she removed the headphone from one ear.

Dt looked back at her.

“Sure, how do you want me to thank you?”

Ai Qing looked past him at the five gold medals on stage. “Gold medal. If you can win gold today, then we’ll be the group champion.”

“Alright.” Dt responded as the edges of his lips curled up into a smile.

He took off his cap and casually placed it onto her head, then went back onto the stage.

Chapter 19

God's Left Hand - Prelude: Chapter 19

Alright folks. We're done with the prelude. Now the real romance starts.

Thailand's total annihilation came first, followed by Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia, the strongest team.

When Dt's team stood from their chairs, even the opposing team stood with deferential looks to the five teenagers in black uniforms.

Whether their opponents played with an aggressive ganking strategy or a steady, conservative playstyle, Dt's team only had one strategy.

Map control, locking down the entire map.

During the final match, the Malaysian players weren't even able to take the high ground and were totally defeated. They basically gave the gold medal away.

Because Ai Qing was wearing his cap, it was a rare occurrence for Dt to show his entire face under the flashing lights. But no matter what question the reporters asked he only nodded or didn't give a response at all. While watching him hold his gold medal from afar, Ai Qing wondered if he was too proud to bother answering them or if he was just terrible at expressing himself?

As the group champion, the Chinese team had unexpectedly become the focus of attention in the arena.

They had chased after the title of the group champion for so many years, but when they finally succeeded, everyone was in a daze. After the confusing interviews and award ceremony, they returned to their room, where someone had already made preparations for a party with low-alcohol beer, ice, and fresh flowers.

Slide took out the light blue envelope from under the ice bucket, took a look, and handed it to Ai Qing behind him.

It was written with very familiar handwriting:

Gou Gou, congratulations to you and the rest of the team.

Solo

Ai Qing lowered her head as she read it and with a laugh, tucked it back into Slide's hands.

Solo was her first love, almost all memories she had related to him were about esports. In these past few years, the two of them had been in an on and off relationship but it had now become a stable pattern. She even thought about ending her professional career, laying low, with no team training, competitions, crazy fans, online posts by fans, endless reporters, commercial activities

Either way, she would be able to live the life that an eighteen year old should live.

She took beer from ten or so buckets and began to distribute them to the team, Dt slowly came in.

Several people moved the ice buckets to the balcony and had begun to sing a random assortment of songs towards the beach in the dark. Pressure? They had never mentioned the word. It seemed that everyone

else took video games for granted, it's just entertainment, why would there be any pressure?

But would they know that to become a better gamer, you would practice to strengthen your left hand even when eating or writing.

Fearful that the ice would melt too quickly to keep the flavor of the beer, Ai Qing took the remaining dozen or so beer into the room and began to place them in the fridge one after the other.

Behind her, someone came closer.

It was Dt.

Ai Qing smiled at him, "Thanks."

He had a confused expression.

"I meant, thanks for letting us become the group champion." Ai Qing took a bottle of iced beer and popped the cap with the edge of the marble counter and gave it to him. "Actually, this time I should thank you. At the end of my professional career, we were able to become the group champion."

Dt took the bottle, but didn't drink.

A pair of pink mp3 earbuds hung around her neck. She, like most girls at this age, preferred pink and other rosy colors. On her neck and under the straight hair, she wore a necklace with a tiny pink skull.

There was nothing special about her, when she's off the competition stage, she was just a normal, pretty girl.

Three years earlier, when Dt saw her, that was when he had just returned to China. His cousin had dragged him to a CS competition.

At that time, she had short hair that fell to the bottom of her ears, which made her eyes appear larger.

Among the esports teams, there were very few girls. She became the focus of conversation at the stadium. After he sat down to watch the game, there were several boys behind him who kept talking about her. They kept calling her “Apple Dog.” This was the first time he had heard people praise a girl, not for her beauty, personality, nor academic ability.

But: was sharp, had a god-like sixth sense, and was a king of aiming.

She could even accurately shoot after being blinded by a flash bang, killing others with her sixth sense.

He remembered the moment when she finally won the game, she bit her lower lip and jokingly leaned on Solo’s shoulder, who sat next to her, and flirtatiously whispered something to him.

Amidst the cheering from the crowd, she had lost her keen senses and stood up with rosy cheeks besides Solo to accept the crowd’s cheers.

He remembered from a video, the words that she spoke to an Associated Press reporter:

“Please don’t call us players. We’re just normal athletes, just like any other sport contestant.” When she laughed, a tiny dimple was on her left cheek. “In online games, you need time and money to build up your character’s ability. But that’s just the ability of the character that you’re controlling. In the world of esports, each competitor's starts at zero. So the winning and losing is up to the individual’s skill. Even if you’re the son of the richest person in the world with the best keyboard and computer, but without any skill, then nobody would even bother to take a glance at you. As long as you have skill, then you’ll have the respect of the people. They’ll even use your strategies as a model of how to play. This is what esports is.”

A fifteen year old girl had spoken these grandiose words.
Grandiose words that could move people.

It was this kind of feeling that made him, a person who had no clue about esports, to become the person he was during the final round of the competition.

It only took him two years time.

Outside the room, somebody had gotten the group to sing the national anthem. At first they were just making a small racket, but then someone began to yell. It basically became a very messy but also moving moment.

Dt slightly lowered his head and gazed at the dark green bottle in his hand. “Thank you, Frigg.”

He believed that he would continue forwards until he could fight by her side, shoulder to shoulder, with all the failures and glory that would come with it.

—— Prelude End ——

Author’s Note:

Alright, I admit that what ends here is just the beginning of the story. This is a big, long story. A very long story. There is still a lot more good kids with dreams. The main plot isn’t going to be just about love

I'll use the entire year of 2012 to finish it.